United Nations S/PV.8397

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8397th meeting
Tuesday, 13 November 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Toure
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Lewicki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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18-37409 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in today's meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ms. Joséphine Mbela of the Congolese Association for Access to Justice.

Ms. Mbela will join today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I thank the members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief them on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the latest developments with regard to the electoral process under way and the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement.

The scheduled holding of presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels is fast approaching, as we are now only nine days away from the beginning of the official campaign and less than six weeks away from the scheduled date of elections on 23 December. It should be noted that, despite continuing differences, in particular with regard to the use of voting machines and the reliability of the voter registry, all stakeholders remain firmly committed to the electoral process. The main opposition candidates for the presidential elections agreed on a single candidate on Sunday in Geneva. After a three-day conclave facilitated by the Kofi Annan Foundation, they appointed Martin Fayulu to represent them within a new coalition called Lamuka, which means "Wake up!" in Lingala. The coalition announced that a public meeting would be held in Kinshasa in the near future to introduce the joint opposition candidate, an agreed programme and the campaign staff.

The choice of Martin Fayulu, however, as the joint presidential opposition candidate has given rise to strong opposition among the militant elements of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social (UDPS) and the Union pour la nation congolaise (UNC). In response to their challenges, the leaders of the UDPS and the UNC announced their parties' withdrawal from the agreement signed the day before. Concerning the Front commun pour le Congo, it has just made public the team that will support the campaign of its candidate — Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary — whose programme should be unveiled on 15 November. At the same time, preparations for the holding of elections continue.

On 31 October, President Joseph Kabila Kabange chaired an inter-institutional meeting to assess the electoral process, in which the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as a partner organization, was invited to participate. The Government reported that it had disbursed $322.2 million to the Independent National Electoral Commission on 23 October, with the latter announcing that it had been provided the means for ground and air transport and was ready to distribute election materials throughout the country in time for the 23 December elections. In addition, as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, the training of approximately 600,000 election workers is under way so as to ensure the smooth operation of 75,563 polling stations at more than 23,000 different sites.

Although the accreditation process for witnesses, observers and journalists has begun, Congolese civil-society organizations have announced their intention to deploy thousands of observers on the ground so as to ensure the transparency and credibility of the process. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) also expressed its desire to deploy an electoral observation mission. That commitment at the regional level was reinforced by two high-level visits last week in Kinshasa: one by the SADC Electoral Advisory Council and one by the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security.

In order to contribute to the holding of peaceful elections, a platform made up of various religious

leaders — through the Commission for Integrity and Electoral Mediation — has just organized a forum for peace and reconciliation with the aim of bringing participants together to sign an act of commitment for the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent elections. Similarly, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) will hold its fifty-seventh plenary assembly from 20 to 22 November in Kinshasa, also in order to evaluate the electoral process.

It is worth noting that, in a recent interview with international press, the Vice-President of CENCO and new Archbishop of Kinshasa, Monsignor Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, emphasized the need to reach consensus with regard to the voting machines so that that element does not constitute an obstacle to the holding of elections.

In spite of this dynamic that is setting the course for the elections on 23 December, the opposition is concerned about the narrowing of the political space, including the impossibility of holding meetings throughout the country and a lack of equitable access to public media. The opposition also condemns what it regards as the alleged use of State resources for the benefit of the candidate of the Front commun pour le Congo.

There is still much progress to be made to create an environment conducive to credible elections. It is precisely for that reason that I am sparing no effort in my good offices. I have initiated meetings with all the candidates for the presidential election and, in each of my encounters, I have insisted on the need to demonstrate tolerance and a patriotic spirit in order to reach consensus on their differences so as not to miss the opportunity to make the 23 December elections a veritable success.

I am also appealing to the Congolese authorities to ensure that the freedoms of expression and demonstration — which are the prerequisites for the establishment of a democratic debate — are respected. Elections that are accepted by the broadest possible majority of Congolese men and women will mark a major turning point in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by contributing to the strengthening of institutions, peacebuilding, democratic gains and the sustainable development of the country.

(*spoke in English*)

These long-awaited elections will take place in a volatile security environment in many parts of the country. Allow me to highlight several of our biggest concerns today.

First, I have grown increasingly alarmed over the situation in Beni in recent months, where we continue to face major challenges in implementing our mandate. As I mentioned to the Council during my previous briefing (see S/PV.8370), civilians, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO alike are being targeted by the Allied Democratic Forces and Mayi-Mayi groups. Despite FARDC efforts and the Mission's robust patrolling and ongoing joint operations — the latest of which started yesterday — the attacks continue and are increasingly taking place near the centre of the town of Beni.

As members know, we are not only facing security challenges in Beni, but also supporting a major Ebola response effort. The recent visit by the Director-General of the World Health Organization and the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations helped to underscore the commendable results that can be achieved through coordinated efforts. Teams from the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization and other humanitarian partners are doing a remarkable job, with the support of MONUSCO.

However, we are still seeing a growing number of cases in the major population centres of Beni and Butembo, as well as significant community resistance to response efforts. Women are disproportionately affected, representing about 60 per cent of all probable and confirmed cases, due to a number of factors, including their roles as caregivers of the diseased. The Mission will continue its support to Ebola efforts as a matter of the utmost priority while also taking into account a gendered response lens. Our teams on the ground are providing extensive logistical and protection support to partners and are engaging with local authorities and communities to encourage their acceptance of response efforts.

Secondly, there is potential for armed group interference in elections in specific areas throughout eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — particularly in Tanganyika, South Kivu and the Grand and Petit Nord areas of North Kivu. Armed group violence in those key provinces could affect the

secure deployment of electoral material and may prevent certain parts of the population from voting on election day, thereby impacting the inclusivity of the process. It will be especially important for the Government to take steps in the coming weeks to secure polls, particularly to ensure the participation of women, who make up 50 per cent of registered voters.

Thirdly, we are also carefully watching the situation in the Kasais, following the forced return of Congolese migrants from Angola. Given the pace of returns, the limited capacity to receive returnees on the ground and the difficulties they face in returning home, there is a possibility for ethnic tension to flare up in certain areas of the Kasais. Despite the remoteness of the area, in which the Mission has a very limited footprint, MONUSCO has been providing support to humanitarian partners and engaging with Congolese and regional actors to advocate for a more measured pace of return.

It is in that dynamic context that we move towards the long-awaited elections in just over one month's time. Our collective focus must now be on ensuring the credibility of the process. It is of paramount importance that candidates have equal access to political space during the campaign period and that restrictions on peaceful demonstrations are lifted consistently throughout the country.

Further progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures and the existence of a level political playing field throughout the campaign period leading up to 23 December will significantly enhance the credibility of polls and contribute to post-electoral stability. I will continue to advocate with all parties in that regard. I count on the members of the Council to support our efforts and to convey the same messages in the coming weeks.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Mbela.

Ms. Mbela (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Ambassador of China for inviting me to address the Security Council on behalf of my organization, the Congolese Association for Access to Justice.

I am Joséphine Mbela and I am a human rights lawyer in charge of advocacy and administration within the Association. It is a non-governmental and apolitical organization that works to promote and protect human rights, the primacy of the law and the consolidation of the rule of law. It provides legal and judicial assistance to victims of rights violations, particularly before the United Nations human rights protection mechanisms. I will focus on three points during my briefing: first, the political and electoral situation; secondly, the human rights situation; and, thirdly, the low participation of women in the electoral process.

First, with regard to the political and electoral situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the political climate remains tense 41 days on the eve of the elections scheduled by the Independent National Electoral Commission, due to the failure to fully implement the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, mainly with respect to political de-escalation measures.

To date, the Association has remained alarmed by the detention of 51 political prisoners, including the young Eugène Diomi Ndongala, Jean-Claude Muyambo and Gérard "Gecoco" Mulumba Kongolo. And we note that of the 51 political prisoners, 46 have benefited from the amnesty accorded in 2014, although they have not yet been released. To that we must add the 28 citizen movement activists, including Carbone Beni and Gloria Senga.

It is also worth noting that four opposition media outlets are still closed in Lubumbashi, namely, Radio Télévision Lubumbashi Jua, Nyota Radio Télévision, Télévision Mapendo and La Voix du Katanga. Several leaders were forced into exile, including Moïse Katumbi, Musanya Mouissy and Oscar Rashidi Akidi. The electoral process has been marred by strong political tensions resulting from the Independent National Electoral Commission imposing the use of voting machines, even though article 237 ter of the electoral law bars electronic voting and there are approximately 10 million voters without fingerprints on the electoral register.

Secondly, the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo also remains a cause for much concern, insofar as it has been punctuated by insecurity and a growing number of incidents of sexual violence in the Kasais, the resurgence of massacres of civilians in Beni, diminishing civil liberties, arbitrary arrests and detentions accompanied by acts of torture and mistreatment by security services and law enforcement, and the use of justice for political purposes. Finally,

the senior-most officials responsible for human rights violations, including the security agents responsible for the arbitrary arrests and detentions, enjoy impunity.

More concretely, three days ago three activists from the youth movement Lutte pour le Changement were arrested in Goma by the security services because they were peacefully demonstrating at the university. There are also seven members of the citizen movement Les Congolais Debout that have been held incommunicado for two months in the prison of the national intelligence agency for raising awareness among citizens about the use of voting machines. Twenty-two members of the various citizen movements have been arrested for holding demonstrations to demand that the girls that have become victims of sexual violence in the Kasais receive treatment. Finally, 17 other members of the movement Vigilance Citoyenne were arrested for demonstrating and encouraging the people towards civic engagement and the fight against corruption. Those are some cases of human rights violations for which we call upon the Government to ensure their release.

Thirdly, I now turn to women's participation in the electoral process. Women are the least represented in political and administrative functions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Law No. 15/013 of 1 August 2015, on the implementation of women's rights and gender equality, has not been upheld, particularly when drafting the lists of candidates for the political parties for the various elections that were held, as the electoral law does not make that obligatory. To be more precise, while women make up 51 per cent of voters registered in the electoral roll, they represent only 12 per cent of the candidates, which is less than the 30 per cent recommended by the gender parity law.

However, working as a human rights defender is especially perilous, specifically for a woman like me, who has chosen to defend equal rights for all, including the right to live in dignity, especially in a country plagued by strong tensions such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as given my work as a former member of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I am committed to that challenge despite the risks posed by continuing my fight for the well-being of the people of all political leanings.

All that notwithstanding, our Association calls upon the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to implement political de-escalation measures by releasing all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience to ensure the opening of a space for the exercise of public freedoms for all political and social movements; ensure effective protection of persons and their property; fight against the impunity of the senior officials of the security services; guarantee equal opportunities for all candidates; and promote women's leadership in public affairs management by implementing the gender parity law. We call upon the Independent National Electoral Commission to quickly reach consensus with all stakeholders in the electoral process on the conditions for the use of voting machines and the fate of voters without fingerprint records.

We call upon MONUSCO to step up its patrols in the areas affected by the massacres, particularly Beni and Lubero, in order to prevent recurrent attacks by elements of the Allied Democratic Forces. We also call upon MONUSCO to continue to renew its readiness to provide logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission. We call upon the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office to continue its monitoring throughout the process.

Lastly, our Association calls upon the Security Council to remain galvanized on the issue of the protection of civilian populations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in general, and Beni in particular; the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement by the Congolese Government; and the fight against impunity for a successful conclusion of the electoral process by 23 December.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Mbela for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her very informative briefing. On behalf of France, allow me to reiterate our full support for her commitment at all levels, as well as that of MONUSCO. I also thank Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her insightful testimony on the expectations of the Congolese people with regard to the elections, especially the key role that women must be able to play. She can rest assured that her important messages have been and will continue to be heard.

As I had the opportunity to say during the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, we are at a crucial moment in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are all convinced that there is now a historic opportunity, with the elections on 23 December, for the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in the country. Successful elections — which is to say free, credible, open and transparent ones, in the context of a peaceful environment and the results of which are recognized by all — would undoubtedly give way to a new chapter in the country's history. It would pave the way for stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and would contribute significantly to creating the conditions for its development.

Progress has been made to that end. Electoral materials are beginning to be distributed throughout the country, provisional voter rolls have been published for everyone to review and the Government has once again begun to contribute to the Independent National Electoral Commission to enable it to operate fully. France welcomes the progress.

However, that technical progress will be meaningful only if all candidates can compete freely in the elections and if the Congolese people have confidence that their vote will be fully recorded. Trust is therefore the key to success. Efforts have been made to reconcile views on the use of machines for printing ballots and on the electoral register, and technical questions have been raised. It is essential that dialogue among all parties continue to be pursued to respond to them and so that agreement is reached quickly on the conditions for preparing for the elections. All Congolese political actors involved in the elections, whether in organizing or competing in them, must rise to the challenge and heed the people's call for overcoming their differences and finding the broadest possible consensus.

As the Council has frequently call for, fully and in good faith implementing the so-called relaxation measures called for in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement remains necessary. Through its Commissioner for Peace and Security, the African Union has called on all parties

> "to ensure calm and arrive at agreement to find viable solutions to candidate and ballot security, reach consensual solutions to issues related to the electoral register and to making the political space more inclusive, and ensure equitable access to public media for all actors".

The Saint-Sylvestre agreement provides for the lifting of the general ban on demonstrations. Although some political meetings have been held in Kinshasa without incident, which France welcomes, the lifting is still awaited. Out in the provinces, we continue to see frequent instances of political rallies being prohibited, often on very short notice, with demonstrators being manhandled and arrested. It is essential that the lifting of the ban on demonstrations be implemented throughout the entirety of the territory.

The official campaign begins in 10 days' time. During the Security Council's visit to the Democratic Republican Congo, the Government undertook to ensure that all political activities would be free and unhindered during the time of the visit. For their part, the opposition leaders whom we met committed themselves to carrying out those activities in a peaceful manner. We call on all parties, both Government and opposition candidates, to honour their commitments for the good of the Congolese people.

Finally, we respect the choice of the Congolese authorities to organize elections without external assistance. We will remain ready to support the holding of the elections, in particular through MONUSCO, should the Congolese Government so request. Similarly, the African Union has also reiterated its readiness to pool its resources and coordinate its efforts with those of MONUSCO in order to provide additional support for organizing elections. I would also like to briefly address three points that, although not related to the elections, remain especially important.

First, regarding the situation in the east of the country, armed group activities, in particular by the Allied Democratic Forces, continue to jeopardize civilians, particularly around the town of Beni. We are aware of the situation in that particular part of the country. France encourages MONUSCO, specifically its Intervention Brigade, to ambitiously neutralize those groups and restore to the civilian populations of Beni the peace to which they aspire.

Secondly, the Ebola epidemic is raging in that same region of the country, while the security situation has significantly complicated the response. France commends the courageous commitment of Congolese health services and international partners, including MONUSCO, in combating the epidemic. We encourage the Democratic Republic of the Congo's partners to respond to the call and fund the regional response

plan. Otherwise, the risk of regional spillover is high. Along those lines, I would refer to the Council's call in resolution 2439 (2018) for ensuring access and safety for humanitarian and medical personnel.

Finally, turning to the humanitarian situation in the Kasais, the return of thousands of Congolese people from Angola has significantly complicated the response to the crisis, in an area already ravaged by recent tensions. France commends the solidarity shown by the people of the region who provided assistance to the returnees, even though most of them are themselves living in difficult conditions. Also on this point, the country's partners must rise to the challenge and provide the necessary assistance to help the people concerned. On all of those points, you, Mr. President, may be assured of France's steadfast commitment.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): Let me thank Special Representative Zerrougui and Ms. Mbela for their briefings and their insights.

I want to direct my comments today to my colleagues, but above all to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as they approach elections with great consequences for their future. At an Arria Formula meeting on the Democratic Republic of the Congo last February, the Congolese Foreign Minister made a comment that "you have to visit the Congo to really understand the situation there". I have visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, met with its leaders and listened to its people. I spoke with mothers, fathers and children, in and out of camps. Their message was heartfelt and unmistakable: they want a better life. And they want a voice in their own futures. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo want what every human being wants — to be safe and free to raise their children and live their best lives.

There are voices today telling the Congolese that democracy is not the way to achieve their hopes for themselves and for their families. They want them to believe that representative Government is too risky and too inefficient. They are asking them to continue to put their trust in Government that is not accountable to them. Those voices are wrong.

Democracy can be messy, and it can be unpredictable. But democracy is a process, and it is not dependent on a single event or decision. It is the result of years, decades — sometimes centuries — of actions and decisions. Democracy is the hard work of allowing the people to fairly and safely express their will, and giving them the confidence that their decisions will be honoured.

My country, the United States, has over 200 years of experience with democracy. It took us much of that time to fully include all Americans in the vote. And our democracy is still far from perfect. Democracy takes time and effort, but history shows us that it is worth it. Democracies are more prosperous, more peaceful, less corrupt and more innovative. Most importantly, democracy honours the desire in every one of us to build lives of dignity and self-determination, not just for ourselves — not even mostly for ourselves — but for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren yet to come.

That is why so many people have fought so hard and sacrificed so much over the years for the right to hold their Governments accountable.

The democratic process is under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It began with the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, built on the foundation of the Congolese Constitution. It gathered strength with the electoral calendar that set out a clear process for elections on 23 December 2018. It gained momentum with President Kabila Kabange's agreement that he would not run in the upcoming elections. Democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now poised for its greatest test. It is a historic opportunity.

For any country struggling to govern itself, the peaceful transfer of power is a decisive moment. It is the moment when all of the theory of representative Government fades into the background and the decisions of real people in real situations come to the forefront. Peacefully surrendering power tests the ability and willingness of individual men and women to put aside their personal interests and agendas and put the people first. The hopes and aspirations of more than 80 million Congolese people now depend on the leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo passing that test.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been very clear that it is holding elections on 23 December and that it is doing so without the help of the international community. We respect their sovereign right to make that decision. It is a decision with tremendous consequences for the Congolese people. We have spent the past two years reiterating in the Security Council the necessity for free, fair and credible elections on 23 December. All of the

parties know what they need to do. President Kabila understands his role. The Democratic Republic of the Congo Government understands what must be done. The National Independent Electoral Commission knows the preparations that it must undertake in the coming six weeks. There is no excuse for failure, no reason for delay. All that is remaining is for the leadership of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to show the will to follow the democratic path that has been laid out before it. The whole world is watching to see what the legacy of President Kabila will be.

To the Congolese people, as they prepare to take this momentous leap into their future, my message is this: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the birth right of each citizen and every human being. They must claim it; demand it; seize it for themselves and their grandchildren yet to come. I want them to know that there are people throughout the world hoping for their success. And I want them to know that the prayers and best wishes of the American people are with them.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her excellent briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with only six weeks remaining before the holding of elections. We also wish to recognize and express gratitude to Ms. Joséphine Mbela of the Congolese Association for Access to Justice for her briefing.

Having read and analysed resolution 2439 (2018), concerning the recent outbreak of the Ebola virus, we commend the efforts made by all humanitarian and health personnel on the ground, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, as well as all other front-line agents involved in response activities. In that regard, we commend the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for supporting the efforts made by the Government, WHO and other actors to respond to the Ebola outbreak amid a complex environment.

In that regard, we also wish to commend the capacity of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its leadership in responding to the Ebola outbreak, and in particular for providing free health care in the affected areas, as well as for the daily updates on the status of the outbreak. We urge the members of the Council and the international community in general to increase their financial and humanitarian assistance through reliable organizations in order to respond to the urgent needs of the population.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates that it attaches the utmost importance to the events unfolding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, given the strong bonds of brotherhood and friendship that unite us and given that we are both States members of the same subregional institutions. We once again reiterate that stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is crucial to the stability of the wider subregion, of which the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is part. We value the efforts deployed by the country to achieve stability in the build-up to the triad of elections to be held in the country on 23 December, namely, presidential, legislative and provincial elections. That is a key aspect for the future and definitive stabilization of the country.

In that regard, it is worth noting that considerable progress has been made to date. Preparations are advancing in line with the electoral calendar, including the publication of the voting roll in accordance with legislation, the easing of political tensions and dialogue among all parties, particularly on the use of voting machines. We are also pleased to note that, as indicated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Government has made a significant amount of money available to the Independent National Electoral Commission to guarantee the successful holding of the upcoming elections.

It is for those reasons that we continue to encourage the Government, the Electoral Commission, the political parties, civil society and all national stakeholders concerned to continue strengthening the electoral process so that all citizens are able to exercise their right to vote in the best conditions, as well as to raise awareness among the population on how to exercise that right to vote. It is important that they continue working to peacefully carry out political activities and do everything possible to ensure that the 23 December elections are credible, transparent and inclusive and that they take place in an atmosphere of peace, harmony and security, with the full and safe participation of women. Compliance with the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016 is the best guarantee for the satisfactory holding of the elections and the subsequent peaceful transfer of power, which are key aspects for the legitimacy of the authorities

that are elected and, above all, for the stability of the country and the region.

The easing of political tensions, implementing the recommendations of the International Organization of la Francophonie, which we previously referred to, and ensuring dialogue among all parties on the use of voting machines are also important aspects. In that regard, we welcome the meeting of the various political stakeholders in the country that took place on 29 September.

One of the lessons learned from the Security Council's most recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was that for the definitive and resounding success of the upcoming elections and in order for them to be a turning point for the Congolese people, all possible post-election scenarios must be clearly analysed and appropriate measures must be implemented in order to guarantee the building and consolidation of lasting peace in the country.

We reiterate our satisfaction at the public statement made by President Joseph Kabila Kabange on 19 July before a joint session of the National Assembly and the Senate, in which the President reiterated his intention to respect his country's Constitution and underscored that his Government remained firm in its intention to fully shoulder the responsibility to finance the presidential, legislative and provincial elections, as well as his intention not to run as a candidate in the upcoming elections. Those gestures represent a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and independence, illustrating President Kabila's determination and commitment to his country. The international community should continue to support the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the electoral process, while respecting the principle of non-interference, as well as the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

The security situation in the east of the country, especially in Beni, must be closely monitored in the days leading up to the elections, due to the challenges that it poses. In that regard, we encourage the Government to continue to implement measures to address the security situation and the activities of armed groups in various provinces, as well as to protect civilians, with the support of MONUSCO. We also urge all of the parties concerned to act responsibly so as to promote social cohesion, especially during the electoral and post-electoral period, and we call for the cessation of hostilities on the part of the armed groups. We also encourage the Congolese authorities to continue to fight impunity to ensure that those responsible for crimes and gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law are brought to justice.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea strongly condemns the pillaging and exploitation in conflict zones and the transfer of raw materials to other regions, actions that serve to underscore the double standards observed during conflicts and, at times, explain the reasons for them. Without a definitive solution to that problem, the possibility of achieving a genuinely successful outcome to it will decrease considerably. The illegal exportation of the natural resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo generates astronomical economic benefits that do not go to benefit the Congolese people, but other actors instead. It is therefore important to take steps to put an end to that situation and, if necessary, impose sanctions on those who do not comply with international standards in that regard.

Equatorial Guinea strongly believes that the assistance provided by various international organizations, including the United Nations, in close collaboration with the European Union, the African Union, countries of the region, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, is essential to facilitate political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of Congo and throughout the region and in the quest for a lasting solution to the political situation in that country. To that same end, Equatorial Guinea would like to echo the call made by the African Union Peace and Security Council to establish a coordination mechanism that includes all of the actors I mentioned, with a view to ensuring effective and consistent support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Equatorial Guinea also calls for the guaranteed implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa. We urge its signatories and guarantors to take the necessary steps and redouble efforts to ensure its full and effective implementation. It is therefore crucial to neutralize the armed groups operating in the east of the country.

Let me conclude by inviting all parties involved in the process to continue along the path of internal inclusive dialogue and avoid any violent acts that could lead to a

disruption of the process. We also take this opportunity to spiritedly call on the international community to fully support the Government, MONUSCO, the Electoral Commission and other parties directly concerned in the process to foster confidence-building measures so as to ensure an environment that is conducive to the holding of peaceful elections and the commitment to a road map towards the peaceful transfer of power in an environment of peace and national harmony.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the important briefings by Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Ms. Joséphine Mbela. We would like to highlight the efforts being made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Independent National Electoral Commission to comply with the electoral calendar and hold on 23 December transparent, free, credible and inclusive elections.

In that regard, we must reiterate the importance of ensuring that citizens exercise their electoral rights by giving all candidates and their parties full and equal opportunities to promote and advertise their proposals and platforms. That means, among other things, guaranteeing the full exercise of the freedoms of association, expression and the press. We also underline the crucial importance for all political actors to remain committed to the 31 December 2016 political agreement and the subsequent implementation of confidence-building measures.

We urge the political actors to maintain close coordination with the Government and the Electoral Commission, with a view to resolving any concerns on logistical issues such as the use of voting machines and voter registration, so as to prevent any possible challenge to the results and ensure a normal electoral process. In that regard, we also consider it necessary to have in place contingency plans for possible incidents. We deem essential the constructive involvement of all actors in supporting security measures that may be necessary to ensure a normal electoral process. We note with particular concern the situation of insecurity in the east of the country. In addition, we highlight that the outbreak of the Ebola virus makes addressing the serious challenges the country is facing even more complicated. We must condemn the latest attacks in Beni and Ituri perpetrated by armed groups against civilians and health personnel, as well as the kidnapping of minors, and express our solidarity with the victims.

In that connection, we would like to highlight the work carried out in such difficult conditions by Government health personnel, with the vital support of the World Health Organization and the United Nations, as well as the protection provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We underscore the importance of the international community redoubling its efforts to address the grave humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Finally, we wish to stress the importance for the international community, including the relevant regional and subregional organizations, to continue to closely monitor the electoral process and the post-election period, with a view to supporting and accompanying the process of building sustainable peace in the country.

Mr. Toure (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her detailed briefing on developments in that country. We also thank Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her enlightening briefing.

As the holding of the presidential, legislative and provincial elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo is five weeks away, my delegation commends the Independent National Electoral Commission for its successful preparation of the electoral process, which will enter its crucial phase at the 22 November launch of the electoral campaign. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire calls on all Congolese political actors involved in the electoral process to carry out a peaceful campaign and create an environment conducive to the holding on 23 December of free, transparent and credible elections. We also encourage the Commission to strengthen its efforts to raise awareness among voters on how to use voting machines and to inform them that they are secure.

On the eve of the launching of the electoral campaign, the health situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, marked by the continuing Ebola epidemic, remains a matter of concern for my delegation. Indeed, the electoral campaign, which will bring about large gatherings and movements of the population, gives rise to fears of high risks of the spread of the disease. My delegation therefore calls on national and international health authorities to be vigilant in strengthening preventive measures during

the electoral period. To that end, we welcome the joint evaluation mission on the situation on the ground carried out on 5 November in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Mr. Jean Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Mr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, a few days after the adoption of resolution 2439 (2018), on the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We also commend the work of the United Nations staff, MONUSCO, the Ministry of Health of the Democratic Republic of Congo and all the bilateral and multilateral partners who are in a challenging environment leading the fight against that epidemic.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire appreciates the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, all the staff of MONUSCO and the United Nations agencies, regional and international organizations and all the partners that provide support to the Democratic Republic of Congo. We encourage all of them to maintain and increase their level of assistance to that country with a view to restoring peace and stability.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her continuous, tireless efforts, as well as those of her team. We believe that the United Nations, including her good offices, play a significant role, and we deeply appreciate her updates to the Security Council. We are also very grateful to Ms. Mbela for her valuable perspectives from the ground. We understand that the situation and the circumstances under which she operates are not always easy.

We are now less than two months away from decisive elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I was encouraged by the Special Representative's message today that the main players are committed to making sure that the electoral process is successful, because transparent, credible and inclusive elections would contribute to peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region. Should they fall short, all of that would no longer be certain. The Council must therefore remain actively engaged. I would like to focus on three important aspects in the preparations for the elections: confidence-building, ensuring democratic space, and international support.

Confidence in the electoral process will be key for the elections to be credible and to produce an outcome that would be acceptable to all. Important progress has been made in recent weeks, especially on the technical aspects of preparations. However, significant challenges remain to bridge the confidence gaps. In that regard, we welcome the steps taken by the Independent National Electoral Commission and Special Representative Zerrougui to build trust in the electoral process. We call on all parties to re-engage in consultations to resolve outstanding issues. The Government, of course, holds a particular responsibility in that regard.

Disagreement on voting rolls and voting machines, including the uncertainty around timely delivery of the equipment, continues to be of concern. There is still need for greater outreach and public information about the electoral process, including the voting machines, from the Electoral Commission, the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and other civil society stakeholders. That is especially important in regions outside of Kinshasa. There now needs to be a clear, common understanding among the main political actors as regards the outstanding technical aspects, including on the voting machines, in order to de-escalate tensions and quell over-politicization of the issue.

The restrictions on democratic space continue to hamper the prospects for credible elections, as set out today by Ms. Mbela. The New Year's agreement and the confidence-building measures foreseen therein must be fully implemented by all parties. It is important that all candidates have the same possibilities to campaign, including through access to media. National civil-society-led observations of the elections will play a crucial role and must be allowed to carry out their work without interference. Safeguarding the democratic space through ensuring the full and equal participation of women is also critical. That includes clear information about voting rights and registration processes.

The high levels of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and other human rights violations and abuses must be addressed. As we heard today, the security situation also has a direct impact on the Ebola response. We welcome the recent visit of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Lacroix, and the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Mr. Tedros, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Council remains unified in its support to halt this health crisis, as reflected in resolution 2439 (2018), which we adopted two weeks

ago. We appreciate the Government's efforts, as well as those of the United Nations and health workers on the ground, and we continue to emphasize the need to prevent the disease from spreading, including to neighbouring countries. We have heard the concerns in that regard today by the Special Representative, including on the security situation in Beni.

We welcome the regional initiatives by the Southern African Development (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo with election observation missions. The Government should be encouraged to also engage with other regional and international actors in that regard. It is crucial that the United Nations and MONUSCO continue to assist the Government and the Electoral Commission before, during and after the elections. Technical support as well as the Special Representative's good offices are essential. MONUSCO should also continue to be prepared to support the logistical preparations for the elections.

International and United Nations staff, including election observers, peacekeepers and experts working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, must be able to safely carry out their tasks. The Government bears the primary responsibility to protect international staff within its territory and to hold perpetrators accountable. We would like to recall that attacks on peacekeepers and United Nations personnel and experts are sanctionable offenses under the Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions regime.

The international community's united support for credible elections is clearly demonstrated in the joint communiqué issued by the African Union Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council in July, as well as the joint communiqué of the AU, SADC, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and United Nations on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Maintaining that unity for the entire electoral cycle, including the post-election period, will be significant.

In conclusion, bridging the confidence gaps, ensuring democratic space, addressing violence and maintaining unified international support will be critical to ensure credible, transparent and inclusive elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The elections on 23 December are not a panacea for all troubles, but they would be a crucial step in the work towards achieving peace and stability in the country and beyond.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and Ms. Joséphine Mbela for their statements and information provided.

During the recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was led jointly by France and Equatorial Guinea, we had an opportunity to converse with the Independent National Electoral Commission, as well as with Government authorities, including President Kabila Kabange. That allowed both the host country and the members of the Security Council to make clear their positions and expectations regarding the forthcoming elections. We believe, in that context, that the most propitious thing to do at this stage is to express full support for the progress and commitment shown by the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet the deadlines established in the electoral calendar, without prejudice to the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of 31 December 2016, in particular to the confidence-building measures enshrined therein, which are conducive to the effective realization of elections and a peaceful transfer of Government. In order to arrive at consensus on key issues surrounding the electoral process, and in accordance with the call made by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo last October, we call again for its complete and effective implementation.

Another conclusion that the visit allowed us to reach is the fact that there is a need for the Government and the opposition to work together in order to be able to advance confidence-building measures. With that understanding, although it is necessary for the Government to take the initiative and assume leadership with regard to its implementation, those measures will not be feasible without the participation of the opposition. We therefore condemn the call to protests, which is inflammatory and leads to violence. We urge the populace to respect the law. We reiterate our call to all parties to work together and collaborate with a view to the holding of transparent, credible, peaceful and inclusive elections, with the full and effective participation of women and young people at all stages of the electoral process. We take note of the meeting held by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of the

Interior, Mr. Henri Mova, regarding the participation of women in the electoral process and his commitment to improving the security of the candidates. Only the active participation of women as constituents and elected officials will ensure an inclusive election process.

On the other hand, we value the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission, in particular its willingness to address the concerns of the presidential candidates regarding the electoral process, as evidenced by their meeting on 4 October. Likewise, we commend its commitment to providing support to political parties for the training of electoral observers in the use of voting machines, as well as its pursuit of consensus through a technical committee. Likewise, we support the sovereign decision to finance the elections in accordance with the logistical and technical needs of the Electoral Commission; however, we invite the Commission to call on MONUSCO should it deem such action appropriate.

We commend the initiatives and good offices of the Special Representative and her meetings with various actors in order to exchange views and establish a coherent and coordinated approach between the United Nations and regional actors. Likewise, we welcome the meetings held with various authorities, political platforms and civil society groups to discuss the electoral process. We support the work of MONUSCO, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa in preparing for the elections and encourage them to maintain their cooperation with the Independent National Electoral Commission. We also encourage them to redouble their efforts to improve the security situation, respect for human rights and to combat Ebola.

The challenges facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the margins of the elections have exponentially increased and their solution lies in addressing the root causes of the conflict, one of which is the lack of control over natural resources, which is a factor that contributes to prolonging the crisis as a result of the fragmentation of armed groups and the systematic exploitation of the country's resources by transnational corporations that operate without oversight.

For that reason, we believe that it is not enough to monitor and sanction armed groups — both their leaders and individual members — and the parties to the conflict. We must apply sanctions to the networks that make up the entire chain of those involved in the conflict, including commercial and financial facilitators. In that regard, the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council must work together to investigate and identify these corporations, thereby countering or definitively eliminating these criminal networks.

In short, the control of areas rich in natural resources and their sovereign administration is paramount, both for the cessation of hostilities and for economic development. When a country maintains effective control of its resources and there is a political will to administer them for the benefit of the population, it is possible to achieve a structural change that leads to the stabilization and strengthening of the rule of law, while fully respecting the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her briefing. We also appreciate the statement by Ms. Joséphine Mbela.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/882), progress has been made in the implementation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo electoral calendar. At this critical juncture, it is important that all national stakeholders engage constructively in facilitating the holding of the elections according to the provisions of the 31 December 2016 political agreement. It is vital for the peace and stability of the country that the Congolese people be allowed to exercise their democratic rights and choose their leaders in an inclusive and transparent election on 23 December to ensure a peaceful transfer of power.

We are encouraged by the peaceful conclusion of the 29 September political rally in Kinshasa, which was organized by seven opposition leaders; the 1 October demonstrations in Kananga, Central Kasai; and the 4 October meeting of the Independent National Electoral Commission with the 21 presidential candidates or their representatives, who have exchanged information and views on the electoral process.

We hope that all national stakeholders and politicians will respect the interests of their people and refrain from inflammatory rhetoric. In this context, we agree with the call of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which highlighted the importance the implementation of the confidence-building measures by the Government, as provided in the agreement.

We encourage the Independent National Electoral Commission to utilize United Nations readiness to provide technical and logistical support for the successful conduct of the 23 December elections. The advisory support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in warehouse management, as well as the development and implementation of training strategies and procedures for 440,000 polling staff, besides women's participation, is commendable.

We want to welcome the outcome of the ninth Heads of State summit of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the Regional Oversight Mechanism — held in Kampala on 8 October, which was encouraged the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all concerned national stakeholders to create conditions conducive to credible, inclusive and peaceful elections. We also note with satisfaction the invitation extended to the African Union Commission and the Southern African Development Community, which are preparing to deploy electoral observers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, we welcome the visit of the Director-General of the World Health Organization and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix to the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak to meet with health workers, civil society representatives, United Nations peacekeeping troops and local authorities. Following the adoption of resolution 2439 (2018), the visit by the two senior United Nations officials sent a very good message highlighting the gravity of the Ebola situation and the security challenge. We reiterate our appreciation to MONUSCO for its continued support to the Ebola-response efforts.

Mr. Lewicki (Poland): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing and for her tireless efforts aimed at strengthening peace, stability and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Allow me also to thank Ms. Mbela for sharing with us civil society's views and expectations. Let me seize this opportunity to stress that Poland highly values the input of civil society into the Security Council's work because civil society quite often provides us with a reality check on the ground.

Like other delegations, Poland welcomes the progress achieved this year in the implementation of the electoral calendar, as well as the visible and active involvement of all national stakeholders in the electoral preparations. Poland hopes that the constructive commitment of all the parties will be maintained until the end of the election campaign and in the post-electoral period. We are highly encouraged by Ms. Zerrougui's words that all stakeholders remain committed to the electoral process. In that context, we reiterate our call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to organize truly fair, credible, transparent and inclusive elections on 23 December.

Poland continues to recognize the building of trust among all political and social actors as a precondition for the establishment of an environment conductive to credible elections. We encourage all stakeholders to continue their engagement through dialogue in order to build political consensus, especially on key contentious issues, including the voting machines and the voter register. Let me also reiterate that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms remains key to a democratic transition of power and the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this context, persistent reports of restrictions of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and violations of media freedom are of great concern to us.

We are also worried about shrinking space for civil society, as a strong and active civil society remains an essential element of a vital democracy. Furthermore, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr. Denis Mukwege underscores the urgent need to address in an effective way the sexual violence faced by so many women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Poland encourages the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to pursue dialogue, fully implement the confidence-building measures contained in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement, ensure a level playing field for all the parties and open public space. We urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities to release all political prisoners remaining in detention, including civil society activists and human right defenders.

We note the Government's recent initiative on women's participation in elections, and encourage the authorities to increase their engagement in this regard. The fair and safe participation of both women voters and aspiring women candidates in the ongoing electoral process needs to be assured.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has a significant impact on the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. Poland calls on all regional

and subregional organizations, as well as neighbouring States, to continue their coherent and effective support for the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, we welcome the assistance provided by the Southern African Development Community to the electoral process.

In conclusion, the upcoming elections mark an opportunity to take an indispensable step towards lasting security and development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We express the hope that this chance will not be wasted and that the ambitions of the Congolese society will be fulfilled.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): We join others in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her insightful briefing. We also extend appreciation to Ms. Joséphine Mbela for her informative update.

On the political front, Kazakhstan positively notes the progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the process of preparing for the elections on 23 December, in accordance with the electoral calendar. This nationally owned process should be held with respect for the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We call on the Congolese authorities to continue executing measures to create conditions conducive to holding credible and transparent elections, with the meaningful participation of women in the process. Further efforts must be made by all key political actors to establish a constructive and inclusive dialogue to achieve political progress, and to build confidence in the electoral process. The recent nomination of the joint opposition candidate for the upcoming presidential elections was a positive sign of constructive engagement. We further reiterate the importance of all parties implementing the political agreement of 31 December 2016.

We commend the committed determination of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assume full responsibility for organizing the elections. In this regard, we welcome the measures taken by the Congolese Government to supply the Independent National Electoral Commission with the means of *transportation necessary for the timely deployment* of electoral materials throughout the country. We also note the peaceful nature of the demonstrations authorized by the Government that were held recently in Kinshasa, and call on all parties to continue to engage in a tolerant and constructive manner. It is also important to provide security for the elections at all stages, which is a prerequisite for credible and peaceful elections. In that regard, we encourage the Congolese authorities to ensure the capacity and coordinated work of the national security forces, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Although the elections are an important step in stabilizing the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we would like to stress the importance of addressing the root causes of the conflict through enhanced support of the international community and regional partners.

On the security front, we are deeply concerned by the continuing activities of armed groups in the east of the country, particularly in Beni, which pose a major challenge to the protection of civilians. We strongly condemn such attacks on civilians, including the abduction of children. Enhancing the response capability of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo is therefore crucial.

With regard to the epidemic situation, we would like to note that while collective measures to tackle the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are working, the epidemic remains dangerous and unpredictable. It is occurring in an area of active conflict, so physical insecurity is a persistent challenge and complicates the ongoing response efforts. We pay tribute to the dedicated staff of the World Health Organization, MONUSCO, the Ministry of Health and all partners who are fighting a dangerous outbreak in extremely difficult conditions. It is obvious that further effective response measures on the part of the international community are needed.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): There are only 39 days left before the elections — the first in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo leading to a democratic handover of power. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and her team for their good offices and excellent briefing. We also thank Ms. Mbela for her statement, which provided the necessary additional context on the electoral process.

Today, I would like to address three points: first, the progress of the preparations for the elections; secondly, the need to further open the political space; and thirdly,

our concerns about the deterioration of the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the progress made in the implementation of the electoral calendar. These include the distribution of equipment and the training of polling station staff. We also welcome the invitation to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union and the Carter Center to send independent observers. They will play an important role alongside the 40,000 local observers. We also encourage political parties and citizens to be certified as election witnesses.

The Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2018/882) that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Independent National Electoral Commission are working together to increase women's participation. We applaud their efforts and urge all parties to use these final days to strengthen women's participation in this election. We remind the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that MONUSCO remains ready to contribute to logistical support. Much progress has been made in recent months, but challenges remain, such as a lack of trust and restricted political space. We call on all political parties to campaign constructively and to help find compromises to meet these challenges.

This brings me to my second point, concerning the need to open the political space further. We congratulate the Congolese Government on having recently authorized several demonstrations, which took place peacefully. Other demonstrations, however, have been banned in several major cities. We once again urge the authorities to lift the total ban on demonstrations and to respect freedom of expression. We remind the authorities of their promise to release 130 political prisoners, including high-profile cases, in accordance with the New Year's Eve agreement.

With the start of the campaign, it is essential to build trust and to find consensus between the political parties and the Independent National Electoral Commission. In that regard, we welcome the opening of dialogue on 4 October and encourage all actors to work together in a constructive spirit. We congratulate all political parties on maintaining their commitment to participating in the process.

The stakes of this historic election are immense. A huge task awaits the winner, since he or she will have to face the humanitarian and security challenges that persist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, I would like to address the deterioration of the security situation in the east of the country. The number of armed groups has increased significantly. Attacks on civilians and humanitarian personnel in the Beni region are unacceptable. They threaten the already uncertain fight against the Ebola epidemic, which has been the largest in Congolese history to date. We welcome the important work of MONUSCO in the protection of civilians in this context. It is essential that the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the international community work together to stabilize Beni and gain the trust of local people. In that regard, we welcome on this subject the recent visit of Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Ghebreyesus.

In other areas, including around Bijombo, the population is still suffering the consequences of violent conflict and human rights violations. The humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate, and we call on all Member States to increase their contribution to the humanitarian assistance plan. We call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring States to implement the compliance framework of the Political and Security Committee of the European Union, and to cooperate on the issue of internally displaced persons, including with a view to their return, in accordance with international human rights law.

In conclusion, we are witnessing a decisive moment in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a moment that the Congolese people have been hoping for. In order to permanently eliminate the root causes of the conflict and instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is crucial to ensure that a democratic transfer of power follows credible, peaceful and transparent elections. The Congolese citizens will cast their votes and judge the credibility of the process. At this final stage, the Council and its regional partners, including the African Union, SADC, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, should continue to closely monitor the situation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her thorough briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the preparations for the

elections to be held on 23 December. We also take note of the statement by Ms. Joséphine Mbela.

We continue to believe that holding the planned elections according to schedule will help reduce the political tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As is evident in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/886) and as we all had the opportunity to see for ourselves during the Security Council mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the technical and legislative groundwork for the elections is happening in line with the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar. It is important that once the electoral rolls had been audited, a final version, without duplications or inaccuracies, was published. We have noted the publication of the final lists of candidates, and we are pleased that half of the country's political parties have signed the election code of conduct.

The political contest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is intensifying and its political forces are consolidating. In that regard, we call on the Congolese parties to adhere to the comprehensive political agreement of 31 December 2016. We do not deny how important it is to ensure that the Congolese authorities step up their implementation of confidence-building measures, and that also applies to the so-called emblematic cases mentioned in the political agreement regarding political actors living abroad. We once again call for respect for the sovereignty and laws of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, we urge the opposition forces to abandon negative agendas, play by the established rules of the game and respect decisions already handed down by the Congolese judicial bodies. The question of the fairness of such decisions is not part of the Security Council's remit, although for the sake of fairness, we should point out that in reviewing lawsuits about electoral issues, the Constitutional Court has already reached verdicts in favour of opposition parties.

We urge colleagues not to obsess about the situation regarding the Electoral Commission's decision to use electronic voting machines, which is the sovereign prerogative of the relevant Congolese bodies. As we were able to see at first-hand during the Security Council's visit, they are essentially printing devices for ensuring the rapid output of ballots in a compact form. It is our understanding that the Electoral Commission is already making logistical preparations for the holding of elections. We agree that it is essential to ensure that Kinshasa provides reliable funding for the electoral process in order to avoid disruptions. We respect the Government's decision to rely mainly on its own resources in dealing with this issue and note that the next instalment of funds for pre-election needs was disbursed in October. However, we also want to point out that the logistical capabilities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) should not be forgotten.

As we understand it, the Mission's role in organizing and conducting elections should not go beyond the mandate established in resolution 2409 (2018). The protection of civilians in the context of elections must be carried out with full respect for the basic principles of peacekeeping and without any interference in Kinshasa's internal affairs.

I want to emphasize that the elections by themselves will not be able to resolve every single one of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's problems. We must focus on addressing the underlying causes of the crisis. We urge everyone not to forget about the importance of continuing to fight the illegal armed groups in the east of the country, which still pose a threat to civilians and are capable of destabilizing the Great Lakes region. We definitely believe that solving that problem should be seen as the main indicator for the country's stabilization and the withdrawal of MONUSCO, whose chief function, after all, is dealing with the security situation.

It will be impossible to stabilize the situation in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through military measures alone. The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region must continue, along with assistance in strengthening State governance institutions and restoring social institutions in areas that have been liberated from the insurgents.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Special Representative Zerrougui and Ms. Mbela for their briefings. I would particularly like to thank Ms. Mbela for her brave work as a human rights activist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for making such clear recommendations to the Council, her Government and the Independent National Electoral Commission. I hope to touch on some of those recommendations later.

As both of our briefers and many of my colleagues today have made clear, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a crucial point in its history. The elections scheduled for 23 December could lead to the country's first peaceful democratic transfer of power. That would be a huge achievement for the 85 million Congolese people who have faced such devastating conflicts over their history. These elections are about more than merely democratic rights. Successful elections have the ability to enhance the political security and humanitarian stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, which in turn can enable future security, growth, trade and prosperity.

A stable, prosperous Democratic Republic of the Congo is vital not only for the Congolese people but also for the region and the world. As we have seen over many years, the insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not only had a negative impact on millions of Congolese people, it has devastated the wider region. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we as a Council hold regular discussions, follow the situation closely and ensure that there is follow-up to the Security Council's visit of just over a month ago, particularly in order to take stock of what progress is being made on many of the commitments undertaken by the Government and other political leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I think it is important to register the positive developments in recent months. We welcome the positive steps that the Government has taken with regard to elections, including on voter registration and the publication of the final list of candidates for the elections. We also welcome President Kabila's repeated commitment that he does not intend to stand for a third term, in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But as Ambassador Haley reminded us earlier today, democracy is not about a single event, it is about a process. So we call on all political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to create the conditions for free, fair and credible elections, particularly by implementing the confidence-building measures of the 31 December 2016 agreement so as to ensure that civil and political rights are upheld. That includes fully respecting the political space and allowing political parties to gather peacefully.

We welcome the commitment made by President Kabila to the Security Council during our visit that his Government would allow peaceful protests by the opposition. We are therefore deeply concerned about reports of further arrests and detentions of protesters and the continued detention of political prisoners. We call on President Kabila and his Government to live up to their commitments to allow peaceful protest by the opposition and to release all political prisoners.

Political parties and their leadership must also do their part and encourage their supporters to engage peacefully in the democratic process. Any violence will diminish the credibility of the elections in the eyes of the Congolese people and the international community. We also call on the key political actors, including the opposition, to engage constructively with the electoral process, including with regard to the vexed question of voting machines and the voter registry. The Electoral Commission's efforts will be crucial to delivering a credible election, and we join Ms. Mbela in her call to the Commission to engage with key stakeholders in order to address their concerns and restore confidence in the electoral process. One way to restore confidence in the electoral process and the elections, and particularly in the voting machines, is by implementing the recommendations of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. We were encouraged by the fact that during the Council's visit to Kinshasa, the Electoral Commission said it was determined to implement the Foundation's recommendations, and we urge it to continue to implement them as soon as possible in order to increase confidence in the voting machines.

We commend the logistical support that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has provided for the upcoming elections so far, and welcome the fact that it is ready to give further support if needed at the Government's request. We call on the Electoral Commission to engage with MONUSCO as soon as possible for any logistical assistance that it may need. The United Kingdom stands ready to support the political process both in the region, where we have provided funding for voter education, civil-society engagement, women's participation and domestic observation, and here at the United Nations.

In conclusion, it is not the politicians who stand to win or lose the most in these elections. It is the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who have seen devastating levels of conflict and the resulting humanitarian suffering since independence. We therefore call on all leaders to put aside their personal ambition and to do what is right for their people — participating in and supporting what is

potentially the first of many credible elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Ms. Joséphine Mbela, civil-society representative, for their valuable briefings.

We are less than two months away from the most important event in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the holding of presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels. We hope they will be held on schedule on 23 December so that the Democratic Republic of the Congo can enjoy the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in its history. The commitment of the Congolese Government to the electoral calendar and the announcement by a majority of political and national parties that they will participate in the elections are positive and hopeful signs. We hope they will culminate in secure, total transparent and credible elections that can realize the aspirations of the Congolese people to security, stability and reconstruction.

Despite the fact that the presidential elections are fast approaching, we will continue to stress the importance of taking advantage of the remaining time to make concrete progress in implementing the confidence-building measures stipulated in the political agreement of 31 December 2016, ensuring that the political process includes all sectors of the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The publication on 19 September of the electoral rolls, along with the efforts of the Independent National Electoral Commission — including a meeting with presidential candidates or their representatives to share information and views on the electoral proce[illegible] — will all contribute to the smooth holding of the elections. The issue of voting machines, however, continues to pose a significant challenge. We hope the Government will be able to deal with it by reaching a consensus among all the political parties.

Given the significance of the event that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is about to go through, the weight of which we felt first-hand during the Council's recent visit, we hope that it will help to end the political tensions and security challenges in the country. We also hope that the Congolese Government will support the election process by ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of expression and by allowing peaceful protests to take place. We appreciate the Government's commitment to financing the electoral process with its own resources. We are also looking forward to seeing it cooperate with MONUSCO so that the necessary logistical and technical assistance for holding the elections is provided. In that regard, we value the role played by regional organizations at this critical juncture in the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The persistent humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is extremely worrying. The statistics on the humanitarian situation of refugees, displaced persons and others in need of urgent assistance are alarming. According to the November *Humanitarian Bulletin* of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 10.5 million people are receiving emergency assistance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is disturbing and makes it incumbent on the international community and the Congolese Government to redouble their efforts to deal with that difficult situation.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep concern about the persistence of Ebola in the country's eastern regions, as well as the worsening security situation there, which undermines efforts to counter the epidemic and the return of refugees from neighbouring countries. It poses a serious threat to civilians and a direct problem for neighbouring countries. In that regard, we greatly appreciate the joint efforts to counter the Ebola epidemic of the Congolese Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations, represented by MONUSCO. We also commend the joint visit last week by the Director-General of WHO and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to assess the Ebola outbreak. We hope that all such efforts will continue in order to eradicate that epidemic as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Zerrougui for her briefing. I appreciate her efforts to promote peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and China will

continue to support her work. I would also like to thank Ms. Mbela for her briefing.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has recently been working actively to maintain domestic peace and stability, promote dialogue among all the political parties and ease intercommunal tensions in the Kasai region. The Independent National Electoral Commission is fully functioning and forging ahead steadily with preparations for the elections. This is a clear demonstration of the firm commitment of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to safeguarding national peace and stability with a Congolese-led approach and achieving a smooth transfer of power by holding peaceful elections. China commends the efforts of the Government and the Electoral Commission in that regard.

The Security Council and the international community should fully respect and acknowledge the aspirations and efforts of the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still facing challenges on issues such as mutual trust among political parties and armed groups in the eastern part of the country. Moreover, there is a risk that the Ebola epidemic in certain north-eastern regions may spread.

While respecting the Democratic Republic of the Congo's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, the Security Council and the international community must provide it with constructive assistance.

The priority now is to ensure that the elections are held smoothly. All of the country's stakeholders should act in the country's fundamental interests, resolve their differences peacefully through dialogue and consultations and work together to advance the electoral and political processes.

The international community should respect the right of the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to lead the political process. The African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as other regional and subregional organizations, should enhance their coordination and cooperation and play an active role in mediation.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has played an important role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the country. China hopes that MONUSCO will continue to enhance its communication, coordination and consultation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and perform its functions in accordance with its mandate.

The international community should continue to respond actively to the appeal for humanitarian assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and support the work of the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross with a view to containing the Ebola outbreaks.

China will continue to work with the international community to achieve peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, based on national ownership, as soon as possible.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November. I am particularly pleased to salute, through you, the friendly country of the People's Republic of China, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo enjoys excellent relations. I would also like to thank you for taking the initiative to organize this important meeting to consider the electoral process and the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to thank all the members of the Council for their unwavering interest in the situation in my country.

I should not omit to greet Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and to express our appreciation for her very informative briefing.

I would like to take this opportunity to convey the views of my Government on the issues under discussion, as we have always done when addressing the Council. Before doing so, however, I should point out that as the report under consideration (S/2018/882) underscores, the political situation in my country remains focused on the elections of 23 December, for which preparations

are going well. In fact, a month or so before the long-awaited date, we have completed all the activities scheduled to be done by this date, in line with the Independent National Electoral Commission's electoral calendar. The current and pending activities can be broken down into the areas of recruiting and training the 511,901 electoral agents; educating and raising the awareness of voters and civic educators, including on the use of the voting machines and the application of the code of conduct; training the trainers of officials for polling and counting stations and local centres for compiling results; deploying electoral equipment throughout the country and accrediting witnesses, observers and journalists.

With regard to electoral equipment, it is important to point out here that the various logistics centres around the country — in Matadi, Kinshasa, Bunia, Kisangani, Goma and Lubumbashi — have received the voting booths, polling and counting station kits, ballot boxes and other accessories. The same goes for the voting machines, which arrived at the port of Matadi to be sent to the country's western and central provinces and at the ports of Dar es Salaam and Mombasa to be assigned to polling stations in the eastern provinces. With regard to logistics, the Government has provided the Electoral Commission with land, air and sea equipment, including motor vehicles, aeroplanes, helicopters, motorcycles and speedboats, along with a total of $50 million to enable their deployment throughout the country. Regarding funding, everything is going according to the established disbursement plan and showing an implementation rate of more than 72 per cent. The Government is working to provide the Commission with the $122 million in funding required for the remaining critical stages.

On the security front, additional police units have been recruited and trained. They will be deployed shortly in accordance with a security plan whose implementation should shortly be fixed through a new regulatory act. Some of those units will also be used for security for the candidates for the presidency of the Republic.

Concerning the management of electoral disputes, courts of appeal have been set up in the country's 26 provinces and the magistrates who will lead them have been appointed, assigned and trained. They have already done good work in managing disputes that have arisen during the submission of candidacies and have made proposals for improving and securing their workplaces.

To return to the issues that continue to be sources of concern for the opposition and some members of civil society, as noted in the report under discussion, my delegation was pleased that the Council members were able to make a working visit in October to Kinshasa, where they had the opportunity to discuss all these issues with Electoral Commission officials and my country's authorities, as well as all other stakeholders in the electoral process.

I firmly believe that where the voting machines are concerned, our discussions and the testing of the machines that was done on the ground will now have ended any apprehensions that Council members may previously have had about their use. In our view, the fact is that when we are dealing with 35,016 candidates for three combined elections that will all be held at once, the voting machines — compared to a 54-page electoral register with photos of all the candidates — is manually the easiest for voters to use. The representatives of the political opposition and civil society whom the Commission invited to test the machines can also attest to this. They understand that the machines cannot undermine the reliability of the voting results because, as we have already explained, the machine merely prints out the ballot paper that the elector deposits in the ballot box. After this operation, the counting will be done manually before witnesses and observers.

As it has done for the voting machines, the Electoral Commission has also provided clarifications for the electoral register. It was audited by the International Organization of la Francophonie, who concluded that it was inclusive, comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date. It now numbers 40,024,897 voters. The provisional lists were posted for consultations on potential amendments, and 6,500,318 voters' names were expunged from them following a purging process and another 337,208 following the audit, so that 40,024,897 voters now remain on the electoral lists. As for the 6 million voters who were registered without fingerprints, the International Organization of La Francophonie, which carried out the audit of the electoral register and noted the issue, emphasized in its conclusions that it did not jeopardize the voting status of those concerned.

With regard to the implementation of the confidence-building measures and restrictions on the political space, I would be grateful not to have to repeat the explanations that have already been provided to the Council on many previous occasions. In our humble opinion, however, it is important to

note that the Government has already taken a number of measures to meet the requirements outlined in the political agreement of 31 December 2016 regarding the release of the so-called political prisoners. All those classified in that category have been released, with the exception of two people who are still being held for ordinary infractions rather than for political reasons. In view of that, my delegation therefore does not share the view stated in paragraph 16 of the report that no progress has been made in implementing the confidence-building measures.

On the contrary, with regard to restrictions on the political space, we feel we can say that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now one of the countries in the Central African region whose citizens — politicians, ordinary civilians, journalists and activists of various kinds — enjoy a very broad and sometimes perhaps excessive scope of freedoms. With 601 political parties, 476 radio stations, 210 television channels and 445 print and other media outlets, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is setting a record in terms of political freedom and expression. Of course, not everything is perfect, as is true of any country. But we remain open and always do our best to adapt to the requirements of human rights and democracy. In that regard, as the report acknowledges, the public protests held in Kananga, Kasai Central and Kinshasa are generally permitted. If some in other parts of the country have not been authorized, that is not in any way meant to stifle freedom of speech, assembly or expression but rather to protect public order.

To close this chapter, my Government would like to assure Council members that the electoral campaign, which will begin in nine days, will be conducted in full respect for electoral law. All the candidates will be treated equally and have access to the media under the same conditions. They will be entirely free to campaign. It is important to note that these will be only the third elections to be held in the country's history. Given their importance, all candidates will be called on to adhere to the code of conduct established by the National Independent Electoral Commission for the smooth holding of the elections. The stakes are high, but things must not get out of hand.

To touch on the security situation, while things seem relatively calm elsewhere in the country generally, the situation in the Beni and Butembo areas in North Kivu remains worrying in the wake of repeated attacks by some armed groups, particularly the Allied Democratic Forces. That situation could have a negative impact on the holding of the elections in that part of the country, as well as on the management of the response to the Ebola epidemic. That is why my country welcomes the joint operation to address the attacks recently launched by the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO. As for the Ebola outbreak, my Government, together with the support of our partners, is continuing its efforts to eradicate it.

As we have previously emphasized in addressing the Council, my Government believes that the road to the elections is irreversible. The Congolese people are determined and are preparing to exercise their sovereign right to elect their leaders on 23 December. In that context, the Council will agree with us that those who call for the rejection of the voting machines and a new assessment of the electoral register just a few weeks before the elections are not actually ready for the elections, or have no real wish to participate in them. Now that the process is coming to an end, my Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo expect the international community and the United Nations to provide the necessary support and guidance for its successful conclusion. I should not conclude without thanking all those who are directly or indirectly committed to my country's cause so as to enable it to restore the stability and lasting peace that we so sorely need to rebuild it. To all the members of the Security Council, I reiterate our deep appreciation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.